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**SRHE**

*Society for Research  
into Higher Education*

**Appointing for Diversity: Can Old  
Universities Learn from the  
Experience of the New?**

**April 2017**

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University of  
**Kent**

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Disclaimer: The views expressed in this report are the author's and do not necessarily reflect those of the Society for Research into Higher Education

## Acknowledgements

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I am also extremely grateful to those vice chancellors who generously gave their time to be interviewed for the project. I hope that the findings will be of interest and value to them and to other higher education management practitioners and researchers.

## Summary

- There were 444 PVCs in the 92 census institutions in England as of June 2016, including 21 vacant posts. This equates to an average of 5.4 PVCs per institution in the old universities compared to 4.3 in the new.
- The PVC cohort in new universities is more socio-demographically diverse than that of the old universities, with a higher proportion of female (34% compared to 27%) and non-white (5% versus 2%) post holders. Nevertheless, PVCs remain predominantly white men.
- There is little diversity in either sub-sector in terms of professional background; PVCs remain almost exclusively career academics coming into the role via the traditional academic management route, i.e. head of department then dean/head of school.
- The binary divide is still in evidence for old universities which recruit PVCs almost exclusively from within their own sub-sector. In contrast, new universities appoint similar numbers of PVCs from both sub-sectors. The direction of travel is thus largely old to new.
- Forty five percent of PVCs in old universities are now appointed by external open competition, which is the norm in the new universities, rather than internal secondment.
- Where PVC posts are externally advertised, old and new universities are equally likely to use the services of executive search agents (ESAs).
- There are a number of structural differences between old and new universities that may explain why the latter appoint more female PVCs. These include a greater institutional focus on teaching and learning and the student experience which provides more opportunities for female managers who tend to be congregated in these portfolio areas.
- The cultural dimension is also important. Given their underlying principle of widening participation, new universities may be more supportive of, and hence more attractive to, female candidates.
- Recommendations to improve recruitment practice include the adoption of a variety of candidate assessment methods, such as practical exercises or psychometric testing, to minimise the potential for systematic assessment bias resulting from an overreliance on the traditional panel interview.

# Research Context and Aims

## Research context

Higher education in the UK has been transformed in scale and complexity over the last few decades (Scott, 1995). However, there has been one constant throughout this period of change: men's dominance of senior leadership positions (Shepherd, 2015). Despite the fact that women now comprise the majority of higher education students (56%) and staff (54%) – including 45% of academic staff - 80% of vice chancellors and 65% of deputy and pro vice chancellors (PVCs<sup>1</sup>) are men (ECU, 2015a; ECU, 2015b). This relative dearth of women at the top of higher education is not unique to the UK; across the 27 countries in the EU, for example, only 10% of universities that award PhDs are headed by a woman (European Commission, 2012). This male-dominated hierarchy is problematic not only from a social justice, but also a business perspective given that more diverse executive management teams have been shown to improve organisational performance (Noland et al., 2016). Although the lack of inclusivity at the top of higher education applies also to ethnicity and disability (ECU, 2015a), it is the issue of gender that forms the primary focus for this study.

In the UK, progress towards redressing the gender imbalance at the top of higher education has been slow (Davison and Burke, 2004). Recent efforts have followed two main strategies: 'fix' the organisation and 'fix' the women. The first is characterised by the introduction of equality and diversity policies and procedures and the second by a series of initiatives, notably the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education's female-only Aurora and Leadership Matters programmes, designed to encourage and support the development of women as leaders. These 'fix' the women initiatives are based on the premise of women's missing agency, i.e. a perceived lack of self-confidence or ambition that leads women to opt out of applying for senior management positions. This claim may be overstated. Shepherd (2017), for example, found little difference between male and female deans and heads of school in terms of their aspirations to secure a more senior university management job. Missing agency alone is thus unlikely to provide an adequate explanation for women's continued under-representation at the top of higher education. For, however many women enter the leadership pipeline, however ambitious they are and however

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<sup>1</sup> The term PVC is used throughout to include both deputy and pro vice chancellors and those with equivalent job titles (e.g. vice presidents, where the head of institution has the title president).

hard they 'lean in' (Sandberg, 2013) they must nevertheless still negotiate the recruitment process that serves as the gateway to these roles.

This recruitment and selection process for senior posts is a major determinant of the demographic of an institution's executive management team (UUK, 2009). As such, it is essential it is undertaken both effectively and equitably. Nevertheless, talented and ambitious women may be disadvantaged by a number of structural factors associated with this process, including a lack of external career capital, conservatism and homosociability, i.e. the tendency to recruit in one's own image (Shepherd, 2017). Moreover, although both men and women retain a strong belief in meritocratic recruitment, whereby the best person gets the job (Simpson et al., 2010), a recent study found that male graduates of the Leadership Foundation's Top Management Programme (a rite of passage for would-be PVCs and vice chancellors) who subsequently apply for a more senior management role are more than twice as likely as their female counterparts to be successful (Manfredi et al., 2014).

The notion of meritocracy is a powerful one within higher education, including in relation to promotion and recruitment. However, it is not a neutral concept. As originally conceived by Michael Young (Young, 1958) it was a pejorative term used to warn against a system in which elites utilise the notion of merit to maintain their own status – and thus perpetuate social inequality (Warikoo and Fuhr, 2014). However, over the years it has taken on a more positive connotation: since the fundamental premise of meritocracy is that status is achieved rather than inherited, its proponents (notable amongst them the British Prime Minister, Theresa May) regard it as a fair system that can help address social disadvantage. To its critics, on the other hand, it is no more than a myth which serves to justify the *status quo*. This is because the dominant group has a monopoly on defining what constitutes merit, allowing it to preserve its own power and privilege.

Despite being identified as an important policy issue (Deem, 2000), there is little documented research on the recruitment and selection of executive team members in the UK (Kennie and Woodfield, 2008) and we know very little about the realities of organisational practice. The relatively little empirical work undertaken to date has focused on vice chancellors, for example, (Bargh et al., 2000), and although PVCs fulfil a distinctive and vital management role – as well as forming the main recruitment pool from which future vice chancellors will be selected - they remain an under-researched and under-theorised group (Smith et al., 2007).

## Aims and objectives

This research builds upon my doctoral study into the appointment of PVCs to address this research gap. This earlier study found that an increasing number of pre-1992 (old) universities are moving to appoint their PVCs by external open competition rather than internal, fixed-term secondment. However, this opening up of posts to external candidates has, counter intuitively, led to a narrowing in the gender and professional profile of successful candidates who remain predominantly white, male professors (Shepherd, 2016). These findings raise the important question of whether this same outcome is being mirrored in the new universities and, if not, why not?

This study provides an empirical evidence base to answer this question. Its specific objectives are:

- To map the socio-demographic and professional profile of the PVC population across both old and new English universities and, in so doing, provide a baseline from which to measure change/progress
- To investigate current PVC appointment practice in a sample of new universities and compare this with recent interview data from old universities in order to ascertain any differences in approach
- To identify examples of good practice and any lessons that old universities embarking upon an external open competition process for PVC posts can learn from the experience of new universities (and *vice versa*)
- To make recommendations, with reference to this and other relevant recent research, about how appointment practice may be improved to help universities appoint the 'best' PVCs drawn from the widest possible talent pool.



# Methodology

A mixed methods research strategy of employing different methods to produce different types of data was adopted with the aim of generating a richer and more more comprehensive picture of the phenomenon under investigation (Horowitz and Gerson, 2002) and increasing the robustness of the findings. Specifically, the research comprised what are sometimes considered quantitative (census) as well as qualitative (semi-structured interviews) methods in two distinct data collection phases. The quantitative data from the census enabled the scoping of the macro level, i.e. the overall PVC profile, while the qualitative data from the interviews were used to examine the micro level, i.e. the specific appointment procedures employed and vice chancellors (VCs)' views of the process. This mixed methods approach had the advantage of providing a degree of both methodological and data triangulation (Bryman, 2008).

## Phase One: Census of PVCs

The initial data collection method was a census, or enumeration of an entire population. This was designed to provide a snapshot in time of the demographic and professional profile of PVCs across both old and new universities, thereby providing a current data set against which to measure change over time. Although extremely time consuming, a census was preferred to a survey as a more effective means of obtaining an overview of the entire PVC population. It both offered the required breadth of coverage and permitted the collection of structured and consistent data to facilitate the mapping of variables across institutions.

The primary data source was the university website (corporate pages, press releases and staff profiles), supplemented as necessary by non-university online sources, such as LinkedIn. All data were gathered within the month of June 2016 and recorded on a standard template, an example of which is provided as Appendix 1. This shows the units of data that were gathered for each individual PVC, i.e. name, academic title, gender, ethnicity<sup>2</sup>, subject discipline, job title (including specific portfolio/area of responsibility where relevant), date of appointment and previous role and institution.

Although the original intention had been to include all members of Universities UK, it was subsequently decided to limit the institutions geographically to those in England so as to

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<sup>2</sup> In the absence of other publically available data on ethnicity at an individual level, a classification of 'white' or 'non-white' was made based on the PVC's profile photograph.

correspond exactly with the parameters of an existing data set of all PVC job adverts in English universities placed in *Times Higher Education* and on the *jobs.ac.uk* website. This data set covers a ten-and-a-half-year period from January 2006 through to the date of the census in June 2016. The cross referencing of the two data sets added another dimension to the SRHE research by permitting the identification of a sub-group of the PVC population who were appointed by means of external advertisement, with or without the use of executive search agents (ESAs). Moreover, it provided a means of data triangulation that allowed the accuracy and completeness of the census data to be verified.

Furthermore, for the sake of manageability and comparability, I decided to exclude from the census population small, specialist and private institutions, such as the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and Buckingham University (institutions which were also not included in the advert monitoring exercise). After these filters were applied, the census comprised 92 institutions: 42 pre-1992 (old) and 50 post-1992 (new) universities, as listed in Appendix 2.

Sampling was not an issue at the level of individuals since the census was designed to include the *entire* population of serving PVCs within these institutions. As of June 2016, these numbered 423, plus 21 vacant posts.

## **Phase Two: Semi-structured interviews with VCs**

Phase Two comprised six semi-structured interviews with VCs from new universities in England. Interviews were selected for the micro phase of the study because of their unique potential for accessing individuals' descriptions of the lived world (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). A semi-structured interview format was chosen in preference to that of a structured one as it allows people to respond more on their own terms (May, 2001).

A purposive sampling strategy was adopted (Denscombe, 2007) whereby participants were selected on the basis that they had something significant to contribute to the research topic, in this case in relation to recruiting for diversity. Specifically, the sample comprised heads of those institutions identified from the census as having a relatively high proportion (i.e. at least thirty percent) of female PVCs compared to other new universities. Only fourteen of 50 new universities (28%) met this criterion, meaning that the target population of VCs – and resulting number of interviews - was rather smaller than originally anticipated.

An email was sent to these fourteen VCs, wherever possible to a personal email address in order to minimise the impact of gatekeepers, inviting them to participate in the research. Nine VCs responded, three of whom declined the invitation (two of them because they were very new in

post) and the remaining six agreed to be interviewed (representing 12% of the study population). These participants comprise five male and one female VC from different regions of England.

An informed consent form (Appendix 3) was sent out a few days in advance of the interview which was conducted face-to-face in a private office environment that ensured confidentiality. An interview schedule (Appendix 4) was developed that covered the key topics and promoted consistency across interviews. However, this was not rigidly imposed and the interview was allowed to develop naturally on the basis that 'off topic' does not necessarily mean irrelevant. In broad terms the interviews explored the institution's approach to making PVC appointments and sought participants' views of the perceived pros and cons of current practice and the wider issue of diversity at the top of higher education. With participants' permission the interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed.

### **Ethics and Data Management**

Full ethical approval was obtained from the University of Kent's research ethics committee and the project was undertaken in accordance with BERA's Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research. There were no particular ethical considerations in relation to the census since it was desk-based research utilising data already in the public domain. The interviews, on the other hand, involved participants in the discussion of sensitive issues concerning the appointment of senior colleagues and so there was the potential for detriment as a result of the accidental disclosure of their identity or that of the people they were discussing.

Every effort was been made to mitigate this risk, including the use of participant codes, the anonymisation of transcripts and the destruction of audio files and interview notes post transcription. The informed consent form (Appendix 4) sets out the procedures for the responsible handing of data in line with the UK Data Archive's identified good practice, the maintenance of anonymity and the avoidance of harm to participants. No individual or institution has been identified in the writing up of the interview data in this report.

## PVCs' Demographic and Professional Profile

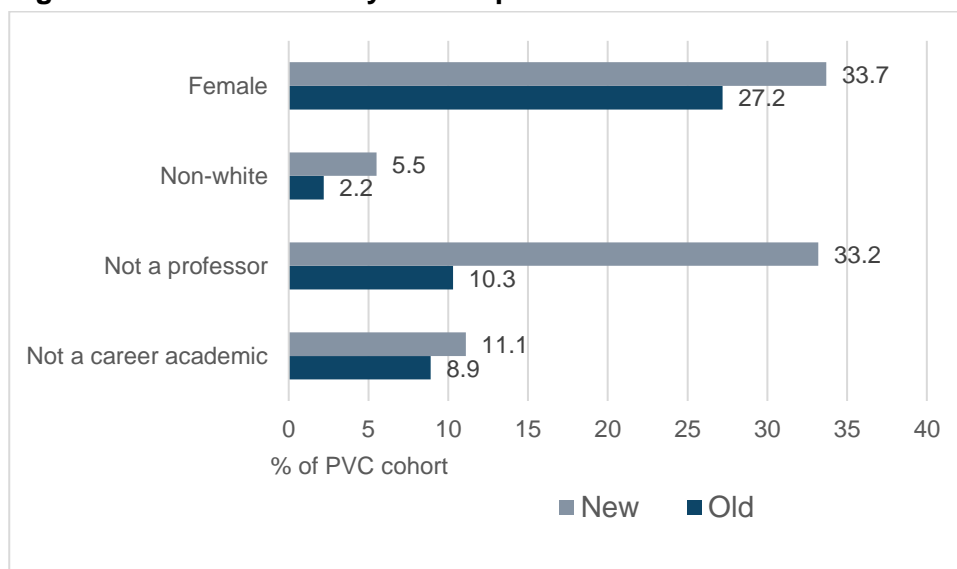
As of June 2016, there were a total of 444 PVC posts within the 92 census institutions in England, including 21 that were vacant pending new appointments. Demographic and professional data were therefore available for 423 PVCs: 224 in the old and 199 in the new universities. Overall, old universities have on average one more PVC post per institution than their newer counterparts: 5.4 compared to 4.3.

### Relative diversity of PVC cohorts

Figure 1 illustrates the relative diversity of the PVC profile in the two sub-sectors compared to the traditional norm of the white male professor. This shows that new universities have a more diverse PVC cohort than old universities with a higher proportion of both female (34% versus 27%<sup>3</sup>) and non-white (5% versus 2%) PVCs. However, given that across the whole census population the proportion of female PVCs is 30% and those from ethnic minorities is only 4%, the overall PVC cohort nevertheless remains predominantly male and white.

One major difference between the sub-sectors is in the proportion of PVCs who are professors. In old universities the vast majority of PVCs (90%) have a professorial title but only 33% of new university PVCs do. This may reflect the more teaching-centric nature of the latter institutions.

**Figure 1: Relative diversity of PVC profile**



<sup>3</sup> For the sake of clarity, percentages cited in the body of the text are rounded to the nearest whole number.

New universities have a slightly higher proportion of PVCs who are not career academics (11% versus 9%). However, despite the inclusion of professional services managers (e.g. directors of finance or chief operating officers) whose posts have been re-titled to PVC, the overall number of non-academic PVCs is still relatively small. This is because VCs in both sub-sectors say that being a well-respected academic is a pre-requisite for most PVC jobs.

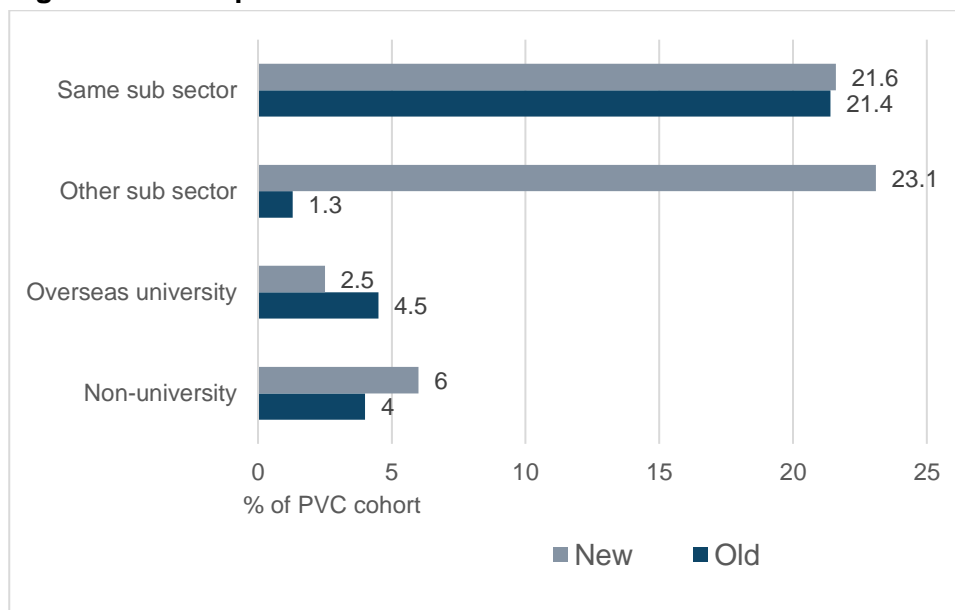
### Career routes into the PVC role

In both sub-sectors, the largest proportion of PVCs are appointed from within their own institution: 69% in the old and 45% in the new. The differential reflects the fact that an internal-only PVC recruitment process is more common in the old universities (see following section). It is also the case that a significant proportion of PVCs recruited via an external open competition process were internal candidates: 30% in the old universities and 25% in the new.

External appointees overwhelmingly came into post from another university (Figure 2). However, whilst old universities recruit PVCs almost exclusively from other pre-1992 institutions, those in new universities recruit equally from both sub-sectors. The overall direction of travel at this management level is therefore primarily from the old to the new universities.

“...it is well known in the sector that if you have a single post-92 career background it’s not worth applying to the pre-92s ‘cause the view of the sector is you don’t get shortlisted. But there’s also the view that if you’ve done the pre-92 there is some sort of tradition and some sort of quality kite mark that you bring to--, so it’s well known in the sector that exchange is one way.” (VC2)

**Figure 2: PVCs’ previous institution**



In addition, there are a few appointments in each sub-sector from overseas universities.

Given that the vast majority of PVCs in both sub sectors are career academics, it is unsurprising that only a very small proportion (4% in the old and 6% in the new) came into their role from any organisation other than a university (Figure 2) or from a non-academic post (Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Most senior post previously held by PVCs**

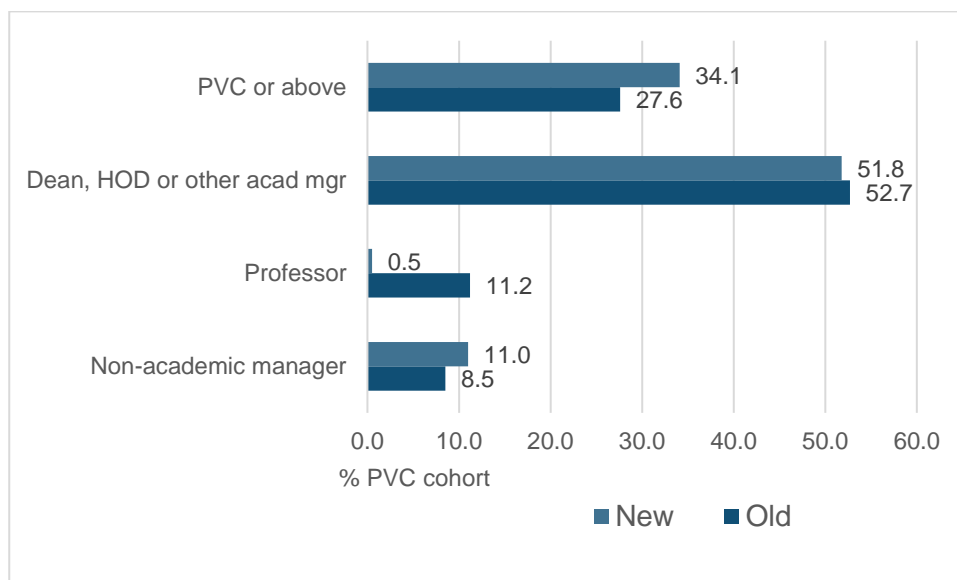


Figure 3 compares the most senior post previously held by the PVC cohort in each sub-sector. It shows that the traditional academic management route into a PVC position, i.e. via head of department then dean or head of school roles, remains unchanged. Around half of PVCs in both sub-sectors had been either a dean, head of school, head of department or other type of academic manager. A further 27% in the old and 32% in the new universities had already been a PVC, providing further evidence of the emergence of the 'career PVC' moving from one PVC post to another (Shepherd, 2014). In addition, a small number (10 in the old and 11 in the new) had previously been a DVC or VC.

# Recruitment Methods

## Choice of internal or external recruitment

VC interviewees in the new universities indicated that external open competition for PVC posts is the norm within their institutions. The reasons given for this choice of method echo those voiced by their counterparts in the old university sector, i.e. that external recruitment permits internal candidates to be tested against the field (particularly important given that in new universities they are permanent positions); affords successful candidates more credibility/authority for having secured their post by means of external open competition; and offers greater transparency of the recruitment process that precludes any accusations of shoulder-tapping or “favouritism” (VC3).

“...there’s no deals, there’s no hidden agreements, its’s transparent, explicit.” (VC2)

The prevalence of an external open competition model of PVC recruitment within the new universities, is illustrated in Table 1, with nearly three-quarters (73%) of their PVCs recruited in this way compared to 45% in the old universities. This latter figure shows the extent to which the traditional internal secondment appointment model in the old universities has given way to one of external open competition.

**Table 1: Recruitment method**

<i>Recruitment method</i>	<i>Old universities</i>		<i>New universities</i>	
	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
External advertisement:	87	38.8	113 <sup>4</sup>	56.8
(Of which, ESA utilised)	(56)	(64.4)	(73)	(64.6)
Other external competition (method unknown)	13	5.9	32	16.1
Internal-only process	124	55.3	54	27.1
<i>Total</i>	<i>224</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>199</i>	<i>100.0</i>

<sup>4</sup> This figure may be an underestimate. This is because the permanent nature of PVC jobs in new universities means that it possible that some PVCs in post at the time of the census were appointed via external advertisements placed prior to the start of the advert monitoring exercise in January 2006.

As shown in Table 1, the mapping of the census data against that from the advert monitoring exercise revealed 200 PVCs (87 in the old universities and 113 in the new) who had been appointed following external advertisement of their post, regardless of whether they were internal or external appointees. In addition, there were 45 PVCs (13 in the old and 32 in the new universities) identified as having come into their current post from another institution, yet for whom there was no record of an external advert having been placed. The reasons for this are unclear. It may be because the external adverts were outside the monitoring period, in publications not covered by the monitoring exercise, or simply missed in error. Alternatively, evidence from previous interviews undertaken by the author suggests that a few institutions have used ESAs (or an internal search committee) to find external candidates without placing an advertisement.

### **Use of executive search agents**

Interview participants included a cross section of VCs who normally use ESAs for PVC posts, who sometimes use them, who never use them, and those who use them only if the institution's initial attempt(s) have not been successful. Not surprisingly therefore there were mixed views about the pros and cons of utilising ESAs. On the positive side they are said to take some of the burden of the initial sifting of candidates off institutions and to have helped universities access candidates they could not otherwise have reached. Perceived disadvantages are that ESAs are expensive, of variable quality, may have a destabilising influence on potential candidates they approach and act as a salary escalator (because they get a percentage of the successful candidate's salary).

Furthermore, as was the case with VCs in old universities, there were differing opinions as to whether ESAs help or hinder from a diversity perspective. Some argue that they simply recirculate the same pool of candidates "like a carousel":

"...there tends to be pools of people that people know and it's the same group that go round until somebody's appointed, and then there's another pool." (VC2)

Others suggest that the facility to reach more candidates may lead to greater diversity. However, this may not necessarily be the case. One VC noted that even when ESAs do propose non-traditional candidates, they may not prove acceptable to the university appointments committee.

"...I was talking to the headhunters afterwards and they said...you know, 'We've had some fantastic candidates for posts recently, but because they don't look right, the governing body just aren't interested'." (VC1)

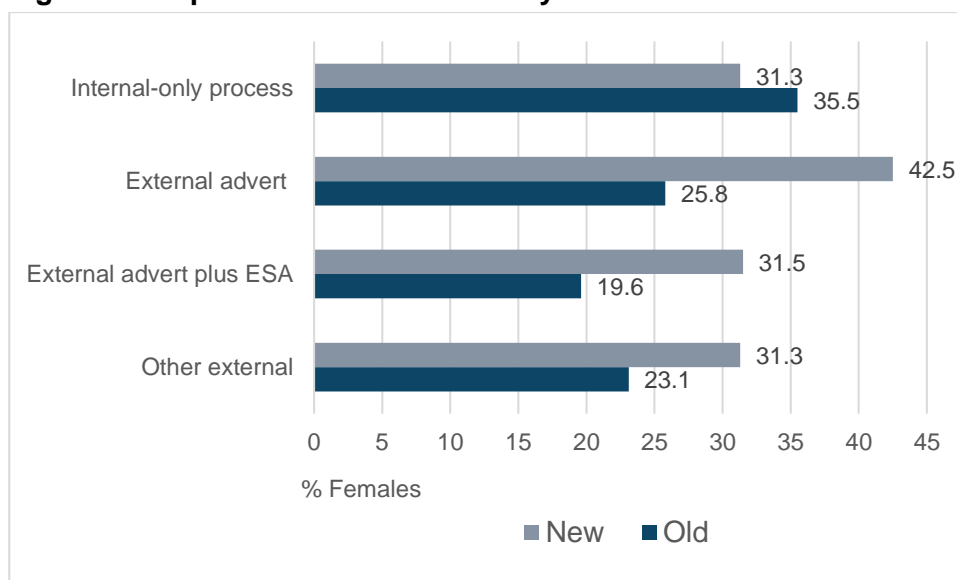


Whatever their views on ESAs, however, the data shows that both old and new universities use ESAs in 65% of cases where PVC posts are externally advertised (Table 1). Space precludes a fuller discussion of the implications of using ESAs. However, this issue – and others raised in this report - will be explored in more detail in the journal articles that form the academic output from this research.

### Recruitment method and gender

Figure 3 provides an analysis of the proportion of female PVCs appointed via each recruitment method. This shows that the choice of method has little differential influence on the gender balance of successful candidates in the new universities, except in the case of external advertisement without the use of an ESA where it rises from 31% to 42%.

**Figure 3: Proportion of female PVCs by recruitment method**



In the case of the old universities, however, the proportion of women appointed via an internal-only process is significantly higher at 35% than when any external open competition method is adopted (22%). This reinforces the findings from my PhD study where the same figures were 27% and 15% respectively. However, it differs from previous data in respect of the potential influence of ESAs on gender balance. Whereas my earlier study found no apparent negative impact, here the proportion of women being appointed using ESAs is lower in both sub-sectors than for external advertisement alone. A recent report commissioned by the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education (Manfredi et al., 2017) considers some ways in which ESAs may both help and hinder the diversity of appointments and this is an area that warrants further detailed empirical investigation.

# What Do New Universities Do Differently/Better?

Whilst acknowledging that neither university sub-sector is homogenous, there are some typical structural and cultural characteristics that broadly differentiate old and new universities and which help account for the disparity in gender balance between their respective PVC profiles. In addition, some differences in behaviour and approach to the recruitment process have been identified that may explain why new universities are recruiting a slightly higher proportion of female PVCs. These are outlined in turn below.

## Structural factors

- The emphasis on teaching and learning and the student experience may create more opportunities for female managers since women tend to be congregated in these type of roles. (For example, the census data shows that 47% of female PVCs with a portfolio in the old universities and 66% in the new are in teaching and learning, student experience or access-related roles). For the same reason, institutions are more likely to attract more well-qualified female candidates.
- Conversely, the requirement of research-intensive old universities that their PVC candidates demonstrate a track record of research excellence limits the candidate pool and may disadvantage women with non-linear careers or who have taken a career break.
- Senior management appointments from head of department upwards are made on a permanent basis in new universities rather than the fixed-term model which is still the norm in old universities. It was suggested by one or two VC interviewees that this gives women more opportunity to gain experience and confidence in a managerial role and to demonstrate this during the PVC recruitment process.
- The fact that only a third of PVCs in new universities are professors, compared to 90% in the old universities, means that they are not limiting their candidate search to a male-dominated professorial pool (only 22% of whom are women).

## Cultural factors

- New universities were described as “a family community environment” (VC2) with a culture based upon the principle of widening access. Such an environment had always valued women and provided opportunities for them to succeed. For this reason, new universities may be better placed to attract and retain senior women.

“...I think there is something within the old poly sector which provided educational opportunities for women well before it became an issue, and therefore it’s carried forward, it’s embedded in the organisation, and when we talk about flexibility and opportunities for time out and stuff, we mean it...” (VC3)

- Given an organisational culture predicated on a commitment to equality and diversity, VCs said they could not envisage an executive team that did not itself reflect those institutional values. The recruitment of a gender-balanced team was therefore a natural outcome.

“You know you assemble a team and part of that is around those values and that gender balance tends to come with those values.” (VC5)

“It doesn’t make any sense to me not having a balanced team.” (VC6)

### **Behavioural factors**

- New universities recruit their PVCs from a wider pool of candidates than their old university counterparts, including those from outside their own sub-sector and the professoriate.
- Some VCs appeared more willing than their old university counterparts to take a risk on younger and less experienced candidates and to focus more on skills than experience. It was acknowledged that this may be more out of necessity than any particular diversity considerations as they cannot compete with Russell Group universities for top researchers.
- New university VCs placed more of an emphasis on a values-based approach to recruitment in seeking PVC candidates who were comfortable with their institutional culture and ethos – including equality and diversity.
- Whereas VCs of old universities spoke about how they were firmly in charge of the selection decision, there was more of a sense with new university VCs of wanting to involve others in the process and of seeking a consensus decision.

“The appointment--, the constitutional position is it’s my appointment. The de facto position is that we reach a consensus. There’s no point having a group of senior staff in here and imposing somebody on them. You reach a consensus.” (VC5)

The involvement of a more diverse group of people in decision making may serve to reduce the risk of homosociability or appointing clones of the VC.

## Recommendations for Improving Practice

Based on the interviews with VCs and identified examples of good practice from this study, the following recommendations are proposed with the aim of improving PVC recruitment from a diversity perspective. Although the focus here is on women, it is anticipated that these proposals may aid the inclusion of candidates from other under-represented groups.

1. Bring together an appointments panel whose composition is a visible manifestation of the institution's commitment to equality and diversity.
2. Ensure that all members have received recruitment training, including for unconscious bias.
3. Involve HR and/or equality and diversity managers throughout the process in an advisory capacity.
4. Make the recruitment process itself "an inclusive and involving process" by involving a variety of university – and external – staff and taking their views into account.
5. Monitor the demographic of candidates at each stage of the recruitment process.
6. Keep recruitment procedures under continual review.
7. If using an ESA, ensure due diligence is performed on their equality and diversity track record and procedures and that they are aware of the institution's own policies and expectations in this regard.
8. Utilise a variety of candidate assessment methods (for example written and practical exercises and psychometric testing) in order to reduce the potential for "systematic discrimination" (VC4) that may arise from over-reliance on a single form of assessment, particularly the formal panel interview (which may advantage men).
9. Encourage and support applications from internal candidates.
10. Ensure the person specification and selection criteria are both necessary and proportionate and do not inappropriately disadvantage – or exclude – particular types of candidate.
11. Give due weight to skills and competences as well as experience.
12. Scrutinise decision making and challenge preconceived and subjective notions of 'fit' and 'merit' that limit who may be considered the 'best' candidate for the job. As discussed in the introduction, universities place great faith in the ideal of meritocracy and this is often seen as more important than that of inclusion. In reality, the two need not be in tension provided that the definition and assessment of merit is not discriminatory.

“I cannot conceive of the senior leadership team of the university, which isn’t composed of both women and men, which wouldn’t be the best, you know. So--, and if you’ve got a situation where it’s all men, then you can’t have appointed the best candidates at every point along the line. There’s something wrong with your definition of best. You’ve got some mote in your eye, you’re missing something very significant, you’re prioritising in an unbalanced way, it’s because you’re engaging in something which is structural. There’s just too many brilliantly able women for every person in that team to be male. You might have 60 percent men, 40 percent women, you might have it the other way round, you might fluctuate over a period of time within, you know, the ranges. You might even be occasionally two standard deviations away from the average, because that’s the way the cookie crumbles. But to have a really persistent difference, something else is on and you’re making a really big mistake. So the meritocratic approach is right intellectually. But I would say, look very carefully at your criteria of appointment and don't think you're not putting in something which is structurally discriminatory by what skills you prioritise over others. That would be what I would look for.” (VC4)

## Concluding Thoughts

This study has illustrated that new universities have a somewhat more demographically and professionally diverse PVC cohort than the old universities. However, the reality is that PVCs across both sub-sectors remain a fairly homogenous population, comprising predominantly white men. Moreover, even though numbers of women are higher in the new universities, the census data illustrates the fact that job segregation persists with the majority of female PVCs employed in teaching and learning and student experience-related, rather than the more prestigious research, portfolios. In fact, this pattern is more marked in new than old universities.

The old universities are increasingly moving to adopt external open competition for some or all of their PVC posts. Although not a bad thing in itself, there is some evidence that the introduction of this appointment method is having some detrimental effect on women compared to an internal-only recruitment process. My previous work (Shepherd 2015) has suggested that the reasons for this include a risk-averse to external recruitment that favours experienced candidates, ideally those already doing a PVC job elsewhere. The use of ESAs has permitted the 'tapping up' of this type of candidate leading to a recirculation of PVCs from institution to institution, generally up the prestige ladder. This limits opportunities for talented but less experienced women.

It is interesting that external open competition does not appear to disadvantage female candidates in the same way in the new universities and so it may be valuable for their older counterparts to take note of their recruitment practice. With that in mind, it is hoped that the recommendations in this report may help inform future policy and practice in both sub-sectors. For meaningful change to occur however, it will be necessary for appointment committees to review not only their procedures but also the attitudes and assumptions that underpin them.

In research terms, this study raises as many questions as answers and much work remains to be done in this under-researched and under-theorised area. In particular, more empirical work is required to investigate the apparently gendered nature of the recruitment process – including the influence of ESAs, the framing of the posts (via the job description), and how merit is defined (via the selection criteria) and evaluated (via the assessment process).

# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Sample data capture form for census of PVCs

<i>Post</i>	DVC	PVC	PVC
<i>Portfolio/Area</i>	Strategic Planning	Global Engagement	Research and Innovation
<i>Professor?</i>	Y	Dr	Y
<i>Gender</i>	M	F	M
<i>Ethnicity</i>	W	Non-white (Indian)	W
<i>Name</i>	Tim McIntyre-Batty	Sonal Minocha	John Fletcher
<i>Month of appt</i>		June	Feb
<i>Year of appt</i>	2011	2014	2014
<i>Previous role</i>	Assistant VC and Dean	Executive Dean	Head, Graduate School
<i>Institution</i>	University of Wales, Newport	Bedfordshire	Bournemouth
<i>Subject</i>	IT	Management	Economics
<i>Advertised?</i>	Nov 2010	Dec 2013	Dec 2013
<i>Search Agent</i>	Sax Bam	Sax Bam	Sax Bam

Institution: Bournemouth  
 Data accessed: 16 June 2016  
 Vice-Chancellor: Professor John Vinney

## Appendix 2: English universities included in the census of PVCs

<i>Pre-1992 institutions (n=42)</i>	<i>Post-1992 institutions (n=50)</i>
Aston	Anglia Ruskin
Bath	Bath Spa
Birkbeck	Bedfordshire
Birmingham	Birmingham City
Bradford	Bolton
Bristol	Bournemouth
Brunel	Brighton
Cambridge	Canterbury Christ Church
City	Central Lancashire
Cranfield	Chester
Durham	Chichester
Essex	Coventry
Exeter	Cumbria
Goldsmiths	Derby
Hull	De Montfort
Imperial	East London
Keele	Edge Hill
Kent	Gloucestershire
KCL	Greenwich
Lancaster	Hertfordshire
Leeds	Huddersfield
Leicester	Kingston
Liverpool	Leeds Beckett
Loughborough	Leeds Trinity
LSE	Lincoln
Manchester	Liverpool Hope
Newcastle	Liverpool John Moores
Nottingham	London Metropolitan
Open University	London South Bank
Oxford	Manchester Metropolitan
Queen Mary	Middlesex
Reading	Northampton
Royal Holloway	Northumbria
Salford	Nottingham Trent
Sheffield	Oxford Brookes
Southampton	Plymouth
Surrey	Portsmouth
Sussex	Roehampton
UCL	Sheffield Hallam
UEA	Southampton Solent



Warwick	Staffordshire
York	Sunderland
	Teeside
	UWE
	West London
	Westminster
	Winchester
	Wolverhampton
	Worcester
	York St John

## Appendix 3: Interview consent form

### **CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH** **Appointing for Diversity: Can 'Old' Universities Learn from the** **Experience of the 'New'?**

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Sue Shepherd, who is a Post-Doctoral Research Associate at the School of Social Policy, Sociology and Social Research (SSPSSR) at the University of Kent. Professor Sarah Vickerstaff is acting as university mentor for the project. Dr Shepherd is conducting this investigation as part of a Research Award funded by the Society for Research in Higher Education (SRHE). You have been invited to participate in this study because you are a vice chancellor of a post-1992 English university. Your participation is entirely voluntary. Please read the information below and feel free to ask any questions you may have before deciding whether or not to participate.

#### **1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

This study aims to provide an empirical evidence base and set of recommendations to support higher education practitioners improve the quality and diversity of their senior management appointments. Its specific objectives include the following:

- To investigate current PVC appointment practice in a sample of 'new' universities and compare this with recent interview data from 'old' universities in order to ascertain any differences in approach
- To identify examples of good practice and any lessons that 'old' universities embarking upon an external open competition process for PVC posts can learn from the experience of 'new' universities (and *vice versa*)
- To make recommendations, with reference to this and other relevant recent research, about how appointment practice may be improved to help universities appoint the 'best' PVCs drawn from the widest possible talent pool.

#### **2. PROCEDURES**

If you volunteer to take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview lasting no more than one hour.

#### **3. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

#### **4. POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

It is not anticipated that you will benefit directly from participation in this study. However, by furthering understanding of the gender-related implications of recent changes to the appointment of senior managers, it is hoped that opportunities to improve current management practice within universities may be identified.

#### **5. POTENTIAL HARM OR DETRIMENT**

We do not anticipate that your participation in this research will result in any harm or detriment. The researcher is, however, mindful of the potential risk to participants of any unintended public disclosure of

their identity in relation to the research findings. In order to mitigate this risk, every effort will be made not to breach the anonymity of research participants in any form of publication of the research findings. No comments will be individually or institutionally attributed.

**6. RESPONSIBLE HANDLING OF DATA**

The researcher will comply with all legal requirements in relation to the secure storage and use of personal data as set down by the Data Protection Act (1998). Any personal data relating to you that is obtained in connection with this study, including audio recordings, will be disclosed to third parties only with your permission or as required by law.

**7. CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY**

The confidentiality of personal data will be maintained throughout the research process by means of a coding system. Your name will not be used in any of the information arising from this study or in any of the research reports. When the study is finished, the list that shows which code number goes with your name will be destroyed and any audio recording deleted. Information that can identify you individually will not be released to anyone outside the study. Dr Shepherd will, however, use the non-attributed information collected in her research report and other publications.

**8. ETHICS**

This study will be conducted according to the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)'s *Framework for Research Ethics (2010)*.

**9. IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS**

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact:

Dr Sue Shepherd  
Principal Investigator  
SSPSSR  
University of Kent  
Canterbury  
Kent CT2 7NF  
[s.j.shepherd-62@kent.ac.uk](mailto:s.j.shepherd-62@kent.ac.uk)

Professor Sarah Vickerstaff  
Professor of Work and Employment  
University of Kent  
Canterbury  
Kent CT2 7NF  
[s.a.vickerstaff@kent.ac.uk](mailto:s.a.vickerstaff@kent.ac.uk)

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I understand the procedures described above and I agree to participate in this study.

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Printed Name of Subject

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Signed

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Date

## Appendix 4: Interview schedule for post-1992 vice chancellors

- What is the composition of your executive management team?
- Are PVC posts made on a fixed-term or open-ended basis and what is the rationale for this?
  
- How were the PVCs appointed (talk through the recruitment and selection process)?
- What form did the candidate assessment take (e.g. presentation, panel interview)?
- Does the same process apply to all posts and, if not, what is the rationale for this (e.g. is it because they are different types of post)?
- What factors do you consider in making the decision between an internal-only and an external appointment process?
- Who would typically be involved in the appointment and would they undertake any training?
- What do you think are the strengths of your approach and are there any examples of good practice?
- Are there any issues or areas for improvement?
  
- Is it you as VC who decides on the appointment method and who is selected?
- Is it problematic that VCs are generally in charge of the process (e.g. cloning, 'fit')?
  
- What is your rationale for using executive search agents – or not?
- What are the pros and cons of using them from a diversity perspective?
- To what extent would concern for diversity (esp. in relation to gender) factor into your decision making?
  
- What are the key requirements for a PVC?
- Do any of these disadvantage women or other underrepresented groups?
  
- How open are you to considering non-academic candidates, from inside or outside HE?
- What was the candidate mix for your most recent PVC appointment?
  
- Is the lack of demographic and/or professional diversity problematic? And, if so, is there more the sector could be doing to improve the PVC appointment process?
- Why do you think that post-1992 universities have a more diverse PVC cohort?
  
- Are there any lessons that pre-1992 universities can learn from the experience of the post-1992 sector?
  
- Are there any other issues that we have not yet discussed that you would like to mention?

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